

January 27, 2006- THE STATE OF THE DISTRICT

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As I am sure most of you know, this is time of year for discussing the state of our union and the state of our state. Gov. Manchin gave his address a few weeks ago, President Bush is scheduled to address the nation this week. I've taken some time myself to think about the State of our District, the Third District of West Virginia.

I'll be the first to tell you that it has been a difficult January for our state. This time last week I was in Logan County, where we lost two brave West Virginians; men who toiled hard and long beneath the earth day in and day out to keep America strong. This tragedy came when wounds were still raw from our loss of 12 other brave miners at Sago.

My thoughts and prayers are with our mining communities in Logan County, Upshur County, and our entire State. I join in the conviction that these 14 miners will not have not died in vain.

With the Governor advancing new laws at the State level, I and the entire West Virginia Congressional delegation led by Senator Byrd, have already begun to respond by crafting legislative proposals at the federal level to make our mines safer places to work. Unfortunately, every mine-safety law on the books has been written with the blood of coal miners. The nation owes it to our coal miners to advance and enforce new and improved safety measures, and I am wholly dedicated to this endeavor.

And I will continue my work to bring the latest technology to our deepest mine pits. Technology has increased coal PRODUCTION and these same technologies can and should advance the PROTECTION of our miners.

Although our hearts may be heavy, our spirit remains strong. Yes, we in West Virginia have started on a sad note in 2006. But we will overcome. We are a state that has seen our share of hard times. And time and time again we come together and persevere.

And the upcoming year still remains a promising one for the Third District.

I am a firm believer that technology, tourism and transportation are the three keys (or 3Ts, if you will) to unlocking the door to economic opportunities in southern West Virginia and we have made some great progress.

In the area of transportation, for example, Congress passed last year one of the most important pieces of domestic legislation of the last several years: the federal Transportation Bill. In that bill, West Virginia will receive \$404 million

annually in federal investment to meet its transportation needs. Through the work of Senators Byrd and Rockefeller and myself, southern West Virginia will receive nearly \$184 million for specific, important transportation projects.

This Highway bill will be of tremendous benefit to all West Virginians.

Think of all the advantages to having a modern, fully accessible highway system in West Virginia! We can move people and goods more easily and efficiently. Local businesses prosper because they can get their products to consumers; consumers prosper because of their goods are cheaper. Businesses outside the state are enticed to relocate here because of this, as well.

In addition, the Rahall Transportation Institute at Marshall University is furthering its mission of "building jobs through transportation" through increased efforts in technology transfer and assisting new transportation-focused companies to get up and running.

On the technology horizon, the people of southern West Virginia can look forward to the rewards of millions of dollars in federal investment for technology centers in Lewisburg, Hinton and Beckley, as well as the Rahall Center at Concord University, to promote technology growth and job creation in the area. This investment comes as we continue to help small businesses in southern West Virginia obtain access to broadband technology and push for legislation that will ensure consumers have equal access to quality telecom and schools and libraries will continue to get Internet connectivity at affordable rates.

Our tourism industry will reap the rewards from a number of new projects as well. The Coal Heritage Area is continuing to grow and prosper and late last year I was able to help score a major victory for the advancement of West Virginia's tourism industry, securing \$1.2 million in federal funds for southern West Virginia projects.

According to a late 2005 study by the Bureau of Business and Economic Research at West Virginia University, the Mountain State added 17,600 jobs between the third quarter of 2003 and the second quarter of 2005.

This same study also points out that West Virginia's unemployment rate fell from 6 percent in 2003 to 5.3 percent in 2004, while per capita income rose to \$25,681 between 2001-2004, ending a nearly three-year job recession. The 3.4 percent annual increase in income was above the national price inflation rate of 2.2 percent, indicating that the standard of living for West Virginia residents will increase.

As the saying goes, the numbers don't lie. What we are doing in West Virginia is working. And as a result, our people are working, too. As we look back on the progress we have made and look forward to the economic promise 2006 holds for the state of West Virginia, we have many reasons to be optimistic.

That said, I have laid out several goals for the coming year.

I plan to build on the successes of the Highway bill and move these projects forward. Each project represents a unique opportunity for southern West Virginians and I plan to do all I can to maximize the potential for growth and prosperity that continued work on each project will bring.

With both significant State and Federal investment support, southern West Virginia will see much accelerated growth and development opportunities.

I also hold fast to my commitment to Connecting the Third. I want to bring broadband service to the people of the 3rd Congressional District and will work closely with both the private and public sectors to further the newly launched Connected Technologies Corridors Program.

CTC, which materialized from my work with the High Technology Corridors Program, will help harness the resources of southern West Virginia to optimize the potential for the region's economic future with regard to technology infrastructure, technology job creation and retention and regional marketing efforts. We've secured \$9.025 million in federal investments for the high-technology centers in Beckley, Bluefield, Concord, Hinton and Lewisburg.

On a national level, America must act to free itself from the bonds of foreign oil. West Virginia coal's importance in that effort has never been clearer or more significant. Today, coal generates more than half of the nation's electric power, but its real potential has yet to be fully realized.

Meanwhile, America's energy demands continue to grow. Through research into, and development of, clean coal technologies, we are finding ways to use our most abundant natural resource more efficiently and more creatively. Through our coal, we in West Virginia are doing our part to make America more energy independent and more secure, while helping West Virginia broaden its economy and generate more jobs for the future.

These are just a few of my goals for the Third District. I believe that working together we can accomplish this and so much more. Together we can make the Third District the premiere location to live, work and play.

People are coming and they are staying. These folks are just now realizing what we have happily always known....that West Virginia is truly almost heaven.

We are paving the way to a better West Virginia, but the road to promise, like any road, is long and winding and there are bumps along the way. Rest assured, I will do my part as the Third District's Representative in Washington to ensure that 2006 lives up to its promise. Together we can and we WILL do better.

